

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE E-LEARNING CONTENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR A LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM

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Abstract

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E-learning using blended approaches of language content online provided opportunities for both students and instructors to widen college participation. Studies measured the functional effectiveness of the provision, students learning strategies and instructors insight. A language program in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia provided the opportunity for two groups to be studied over a semester. One group was taught using face to face and the other blended with e-learning solutions. At the end of the semester students learning through a survey, their written work and interviews provided teachers with an insight that allowed statistical and thematic analysis on the data collected. The study reflectively expanded on the measurement of the influence of e-learning to support the intensive English language learning of students. The influence of using Blackboard offered three opportunities. First, using Bb promoted students deeper learning strategies. Second, using language learning frameworks for content creation encouraged meaningful learning. Third, the strategies and encouragement promoted students' success which promoted program and wider implications of meeting organizational goals through this collaboration.

Keywords: widening participation, e-learning, deep learning, organizational learning, reflection, mixed-method

1 INTRODUCTION

Providing wider college access to education for university students in Saudi Arabia supports the government's initiative [1]. The deanship of Distance Learning (DDL) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) incorporates the use of technology to increase the support. Hence, this study focuses on an e-learning tool provided through the DDL for a language course taught in one semester. The focus of the process and technology to define eLearning opens the possibility for interfacing face to face teaching with technology [2, p. 1958]. Also, a larger proportion of learners prefer [2, p. 1959] aspects of contact afforded through the combination of technology and instruction in a blended platform. One problem with identifying the teaching without contextualizing it in language teaching leads an instructor to understand the definition without a guide of what happens when content is used. To highlight the identification of e-learning opportunities for language students and instructors, [3] has confirmed learner independence when employing solutions that focus on the process and technology. Similarly, barriers that impact the classroom teaching supported through blended learning [4] have found instructors skills as an area of focus [5]. Particular emphasis rests on instructors engaging with particular barriers such as content creation to support students learning. In language programs, three challenges face the instructor; (i) a possible inability to create content that suits students' needs; (ii) creating suitable content without the time to check how students respond timeously; and finally (ii) ineffectiveness of using eLearning solutions due to unfamiliarity with utilizing online platforms with the issues arising from the inability and how to respond to students. Therefore, the focus on barriers raises interesting questions about blended learning suitability with particular emphasis on content creation for language learning.

[6] argued that blended learning supported language skills building in a language learning program. They argued that interaction was the key for success which boosted students' performances. We endeavored to facilitate the learning support by incorporating elements of materials design [7, p. 198] due to the link between language learning and students performances. Also, [6] linked their work as supporting students' success through improving students learning strategies.

Furthermore, [4] defined blended learning as an adjustment to students' language learning needs. We found the definition important especially where materials or content need to support activities in listening where culture and background knowledge were important. [4] highlighted the challenge for teachers to use materials that supported language learning which raised the issue of material design. We noted it

was important for students to explore strategies that varied their learning. Hence, we created language learning materials that incorporated the use of students' previous learning such as schema [8]. The materials took into consideration the types of acculturation necessary for understanding video activities in the classroom which promoted classroom speaking. Therefore, our design took into consideration of increasing students learning on the blended platform by promoting teachers competence through content creation from areas that were familiar. Moreover, as different interpretations of supporting students might promote a diverse view of engagement, we connected our work to [9] by deliberating on the use of blended learning to improve the quality of teaching and learning as part of widening participation.

On a listening and speaking course, content requires students' acculturation with background schema. [8] introduce schema as aspects for listening such as when a learner builds information for recollection during a listening activity. In the classroom, the activity of building students background of a topic usually requires going through the content as it appears on the course book. Critically, the discerning language instructor ought to distinguish such schematic aspects that lead to language access with materials design frameworks [7, p. 198] that take such distinctions into consideration. Rather than opt to ignore, utilising solutions for preparing students for listening boost the opportunities to recall in class what may be uploaded to form background contextual activities around the listening task. As an instructor prepares content with such a recollection, it is possible for expectations to focus on the cognitive aspects of recalling information necessary for the activity. Similarly, as the learner online is working on an individual activity, the actual content may be a texts or graphics prompting input from the student with a connection to classroom participation. For example, prior to watching and listening to a video about families, students need to recall the different relationships that might pose challenging for Arabic speakers such as aunt, uncle, mother and father. Arabic requires specific names for the paternal relatives and the pronunciation of /ð/ as in th in mother. Hence, when the students do simple tasks prior to listening by guessing who in a picture is related to the speaker, it allows the schemes to be activated through meaningful tasks that focus on the learner's strategy for learning in two ways. Firstly it connects with performing tasks and linking sounds, scripts, and grammar interactively. It promotes confidence [10]. Secondly, through the confidence of guessing, error correction lead surrounded in that confidence leads to further attempts. By trying again, a student might realise the benefit of learning through trial and error rather than simply positive reinforcements [11]. In short, preparing content with schema and a connection to task type may support students by allowing skill building and strategies for deeper learning. The content created aligned with the objectives for learning also promotes the students competence to try different collocations and phrases on discussion boards online. Students can discuss their friends by describing them using language learnt from the lessons and also write about their friends during formal examinations.

Our paper focuses on supporting students' language learning by: creating language teaching content on Blackboard (Bb) and its effect on the learning strategy of students on a preparatory year course at a college in KAU. The research aims to answer the question of:

- Does creating content on Bb using ELT framework support students' listening and speaking?
- What are students' attitudes towards using Bb with content created using ELT framework support students' listening and speaking?
- What impact does providing faculty members with e-learning tools have on supporting the quality of teaching and learning through collaboration?

2 METHOD

The type of method of knowing indicated the choice for understanding [12], [13]. Hence, the paper took two paradigms for establishing truths: (i) scientific and (ii) constructivist. The experimental model allowed our article to search for truth external to the students and the researchers. It promoted the use of tests on the responses of students from questionnaires provided to test their level of computer skills, the duration of staying online, the preferred place for times of accessing the internet, and the selected academic program. To achieve the promotion, the quantitative aspect of the paper tested significant statistical differences in the participants' attitudes toward using Bb. Likewise, in our study, the constructivist paradigm enabled positioning the learning strategies of the students, the usage of the materials, and the collaborative link between the researchers and the DDL. The paradigm allowed this

due to its acceptance of the interpretive stance towards reality [9], [12], [13]. Finally, the online discussion of the themes was analysed using the six steps from [14].

2.1 The participants

An online proficiency test placed students at A1 [15], an elementary English proficiency level. The students were put into two sections to be taught intensive preparatory English at a college in KAU. The sections consisted of thirty-five (35) male preparatory college-year students grouped as G1 n= 15 and G2 n= 20. Table 1 below shows the demography and breakdown of the students learning environment.

Table 1. Students' demography.

Group	N	Language Proficiency	Learning Environment
G1 - experimental	15	A1 – elementary	Blended
G2 - control	20	A1 – elementary	Face to face

The researcher from the DDL met with the second researcher and decided to use Bb with G1 to support their learning. The students were given an incentive of grades for participating on Bb. They were also given a declaration to sign which promoted their commitment to the research. They were trained in the classroom, and their mobile phones how to access the portal and Arabic was used as instructions for some of the announcements to act as breadcrumbs towards the critical link. For ethical reasons, no sensitive data was disclosed or indicative of causing harm to the students. At their final examination, G2 completed the questionnaire which was collected analysed for students' attitudes by a third researcher (female) unknown to the students. The research collaboration was done online using email and Google drive to share feedback between the researchers.

2.2 The instruments

Our instruments focused on capturing data for statistical analysis and interpretation of students' opinions and written work, and instructor reflections. The data also consisted of students' placement test results from both groups and their final results for the listening and speaking classes. The themes from the students work were also analysed using the six steps from [14].

2.3 The research procedures

Students were placed in A1 – elementary proficiency classes for listening and speaking. The instructor prepared weekly lessons that allowed students to learn about American/British cultural elements for pre-listening activities in class. The actions were deemed essential for students to engage in meaning conversations about relevant information due to the cognitive load contained within them. Therefore, while G1 used Bb to prepare for the video activities online at their preferred location and time, G2 were taught activities at a faster pace due to the restriction of time available in class sessions. Each week, the announcements included a forum discussion, exercises in the form of tests that provided the instructor with feedback for what to teach in the next lesson based on students' performances. From the announcements, a link was allocated for each activity to make students navigate easily on Bb. Finally, students were allocated a 3% for their work online. Students were also asked to read, sign commitment letters which they kept in their portfolio folders. As Bb was used throughout the semester, the letters were to act as reminders for students the instructor felt needed reminding. No student was reminded of the letter, and none of them raised any objection to use it. During the final examination, students who completed the exam were asked to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire explored students' background of using technology and their opinions.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Findings based on the first research question

- Does creating content on Bb using ELT framework support students' listening and speaking?

The results of the students taught using Bb showed improvement over those who were not taught using Bb. Table 2 shows the development of results from the students exposed to content designed to build

and use schema for the listening or speaking activities. Table 2 shows the results of the two groups using the placement and final examination results.

Table 2. Mean and student improvement.

	G1 - experimental		G2 - control	
	Placement Test	Final Result	Placement Test	Final Result
Mean	32	12.83	41.55	13.13
Mean %	26.67%	71.26%	34.63%	72.95%
Improvement %	167.23%	110.67%		
Improvement % of G1. Compared to G2.			51.10%	

3.2 Findings based on the second research question

- What are students' attitudes towards using Bb with content created using ELT framework support students' listening and speaking?

The results obtained measured the attitude of students in four parts; (1) profile; and (2) opinions; (3) themes; and (4) classroom observation.

3.2.1 Students' profile

We found that half of the students own mobile devices. 50% of students own mobile devices, and 33% of them have more than one device for multiple purposes. The students reported a 72% intermediate level of computer skills. A vast majority of the students indicated getting online through home computers more often than through University facilities, or through a coffee shop with internet access. 83% of the students access the internet from their homes, and 89% of them access the Internet daily. Furthermore, 66% of the students reported spending more than 4 hours on the internet. The data collected suggested that many of the students frequently spent a considerable amount of time online. Students have a mobile data connection, and the use of pre-paid data-sim connection comes in the second place. Regarding their interest in learning English as displayed in Fig. 3, we found that all students were interested in learning English. The majority of students 76% preferred (Diploma in Business Administration / Insurance/ Accounting / Marketing) academic program among available programs.

3.2.2 Students opinions

The students' opinions about using Blackboard as an e-learning system for learning English language via Internet according to themes fell into four categories: engagement, satisfaction, teacher's role and

The students were positive about their engagement in learning English through using BB (M = 4.15. Table 3 indicates that most of them agreed that using Blackboard is an interesting way to learn English (M = 4.16), and agreed that the teacher could recommend more resources online (m = 3.88). The majority of the students strongly agree that they will use the recommended online content to improve their English language and will look for more online resources. Also, the students' interest in learning English with 61.1% of the students indicating that they were very much interested and 33.3% stating that they were interested.

On students' satisfaction, the students encountered some difficulties during their use of Blackboard. Some students expressed not being able to understand instructions on Blackboard (M = 3.83). Many students also expressed not being able to get online to use Blackboard (M = 3.5). The majority of students picked a neutral response for spending too much time to study through Blackboard, getting disconnected when downloading online content, and not having enough access to computer (M = 3.27).

The results lead us to conclude that the students need to be provided with more guidance as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Engagement (Questionnaire items 1, 10, 11, 12)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Answer
Using Blackboard is an interesting way to learn English.	8	6	3	1	0	4.167	0.92	Agree
I hope the teacher can recommend more online resources	7	5	4	1	1	3.889	1.18	Agree
I will use the recommended online content to improve my English language	8	8	2	0	0	4.333	0.69	Strongly Agree
I will look for more online resources	7	9	1	1	0	4.222	0.81	Strongly Agree
Students opinions average mean	4.15						0.209	Agree

Overall, the students reacted very positively towards the strategies that the teacher used to facilitate their learning through Blackboard ($M = 4.26$). The majority of the students agreed that the teacher's recommendation of websites through Blackboard and introduction to the content of the materials on Blackboard were necessary. Besides, the students found that the teacher's use of the discussion forums and Blackboard were effective. These results, as shown in Table 4 indicated students' need for more guidance on using the Blackboard and educational resources on the Internet.

Table 4 Satisfaction (Questionnaire items 13, 14, 15, 16, 17)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Answer
I spent too much time to study through Blackboard	3	3	9	3	0	3.333	0.97	Neutral
I got disconnected when downloading online content	3	4	3	4	4	2.889	1.45	Neutral
I did not have enough access to computer	4	3	2	4	5	2.833	1.58	Neutral
I did not understand instructions on Blackboard	7	5	2	4	0	3.833	1.20	Agree
I could not get online to use Blackboard	5	6	3	1	3	3.5	1.42	Agree
Students opinions average mean	3.2776						0.240	Neutral

The students were confident towards the appropriateness of the content and assessment of Blackboard ($M = 4.11$). They strongly agreed that using Blackboard were effective in homework assignments, and was appropriately related to course content. Besides Table 5 shows students agreed that Blackboard materials were appropriate supplements to in-class instruction, and for the skill level of the students.

Table 5 Teacher Role (questionnaire items 2, 3, 4, 5)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Answer
The teacher's recommendation of websites through Blackboard was necessary.	6	10	1	1	0	4.167	0.79	Agree
The teacher's introduction to the content of the materials on Blackboard was necessary	7	8	2	1	0	4.167	0.86	Agree
The teacher's use of the discussion forums was effective	9	5	2	0	0	4.438	0.73	Strongly Agree
The teacher's use of Blackboard with links to the recommended sites was effective	9	5	4	0	0	4.278	0.83	Strongly Agree
Students opinions average mean	4.2625						0.056	Strongly Agree

3.2.3 Students' themes

The students' opinions were extracted from questions 19 and 20 of the questionnaire which asked about any positive and negative learning experiences. The general themes from the views suggested a strong association of positive and negative learning around learning itself. For example, students listed items like learning to drive, the internet, with feelings of happiness at improving their English, graduating and learning English. Naturally, some students also identified the internet, the use of Blackboard, high school and driving with negative feelings towards failure at the beginning of the listed items.

3.2.4 Classroom observation opinions

The students' language use was observed and captured by the instructor in class which provided a rich language that students used when describing a picture. The students used phrases and tried to include as many complete sentences such as:

"Japan woman and business man", "Husband and wife in the shopping", "The man is medium tall"

"Woman pullover green", "man like the woman", shopping in the night", "Man and woman happy"

It is possible that students showed how the activities for speaking promoted their learning when asked to respond in the classroom. As the teacher observed students during the lesson, some contents were created and placed on Blackboard for students to engage with before the session. Descriptive language was taught, listened and spoken about before the observation. The observation indicated that students prepared for the lessons online produced more language than those who only practised on the face to face session.

3.2.5 Online discussion opinions – challenges to learning

Also, the discussion on the forums prompted students to ask questions in classroom sessions. When asked about future one wrote:

"I do not know about these programs very much"

Other students seem to have an idea of what they wanted out of the program hence commented:

"I think ADOBE is the best one also the MICROSOFT good ,but the ADOBE program better than it ."

"I think MICROSOFT CERTIFICATION is the best for me"

"I like ACCA program."

Students' schema for learning had been activated by the usage of the e-learning tool to arouse the direction which they thought their studies might lead them. From the linguistic perspective, the type of connection with the classroom also included noticing the errors from the usage of full stops and commas when students wrote or typed. Being a speaking and listening class, rather than a reading and writing one, such errors provided short warmer opportunities before engaging in the session. Unlike in a reading or writing lesson, an emphasis would relate the content to something different from a listening and speaking lesson. Therefore, describing the students' errors in a speaking lesson, it was important for students to make the significant connection between how speaking differs from writing. Hence, students' errors were only corrected as they made the errors to make a distinction between the written skill and how it differs from the students' first language (Arabic). As the typical theme from student's written error demonstrated below:

"he doesn't work , he is a student ."

The capitalisation of the subject pronoun at the start of the sentence and punctuation may easily be more meaningful to the students when using the type of language the student created from an online platform from the prompt to describe their friends. The themes also suggested that the students felt less inhibitive towards making mistakes because they were not penalised online for making mistakes online. The blended nature of the learning environment provided students with an access to learning that might have differed with what they were used to. Such removal of physical barriers might allude to the type of engagement necessary for learning where students not used to speaking in English, prepared for listening and speaking activities online. It suggests that the availability of e-learning supported students learning by making them select appropriate content without feeling the need to be penalised in a test setting with high stakes.

3.3 Findings based on the third research question

- What impact does providing faculty members with e-learning tools have on supporting the quality of teaching and learning through collaboration?

The three researchers of this study came from three different backgrounds of KAU. The results showed that students' results improved with the use of e-learning tools especially when instructors engaged with content from their domain and had an input of the content design before teaching. Likewise, the collaboration of the researchers supported the engagement of students used to technology by employing technology to support students listening and speaking. At an organization for learning such as KAU, the focus for quality through departments working together enhances the alignment of students' learning with the appropriate level of technology to suit the instructor's need. Therefore, adopting the technology and using the feedback from students supported their needs for learning. An underlining theme from the students' question of future program selection, the exposure of not knowing suggests an area that can be accessed through the corporation of other departments even within the same college. For example, the majority of students wanted to study on the business administration program which they could not have access to on the four-year program. However, at the college, such diverse students can be further interviewed to ascertain which path they might feel attracted to through more engagement. The three researchers initially embarked on research that explored the students' success on the program and the types of choices the instructor used with the e-learning tools. The similarity of the students broadening their paths and the epistemological choices for answering the research question incorporated the various skills of the researchers such that their background knowledge supported the choices of content, data and method for conducting the research. Much in the same manner, this research offered the opportunity for knowing to be shared across different departments as well as promoting the wider KAU opportunities for learning at the student, faculty and administrative levels. Finally, such collaboration also proved that the availability of the e-learning tools not only supported learning for speaking and listening of English but provided support for students' learning at other departments to fully take advantage of KAU provision of the e-learning tools.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In brief, the improvement of students' results, their attitude towards the use of Blackboard, the themes and observations of students' discussions and surveys, and the collaboration of the researchers from different departments drove this study. The study uncovered:

- a 51% increase of students learning due to incorporating ELT materials design frameworks on content uploaded on Bb;
- the profile of students joining the preparatory year courses are technology savvy with more than one mobile devices, Internet access points and adept at adjusting to learning online;
- All the students indicated a willingness for learning in English;
- students' need for more guidance on using the Blackboard and educational resources on the Internet;
- students agreed that Blackboard materials were appropriate supplements to in-class instruction, and for the skill level of the students;
- students prepared for the lessons online produced more language than those who only practised on the face to face session;
- e-learning supported students learning by making them select appropriate content without feeling the need to be penalised in a test setting with high stakes;
- e-learning tools not only supported learning for speaking and listening to English but provided support for students' learning at other departments to fully take advantage of KAU provision of the e-learning tools

The context for KAU to increase the usage of e-learning tools is excellent. Students need training and coercion with grades for the using tools like Bb. Strategies that incorporate activating students learning to move from novice to mastering the content support teachers understanding the benefits of the content they design and teach online especially where material may act as an assessment of prior learning to launch into new learning areas.

As students access the various programs to learn at KAU colleges, KAU remains one of the successful learning organisations that promotes a wider scope for increasing the student, teaching and administrative experiences.

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